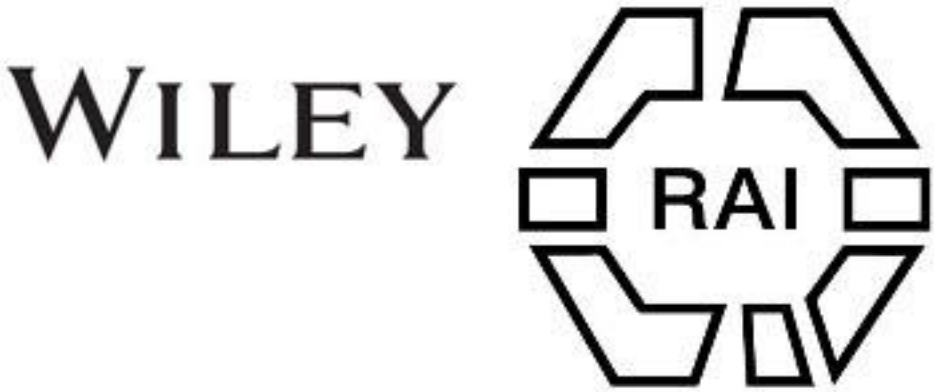

108. Megaliths in the Poona District
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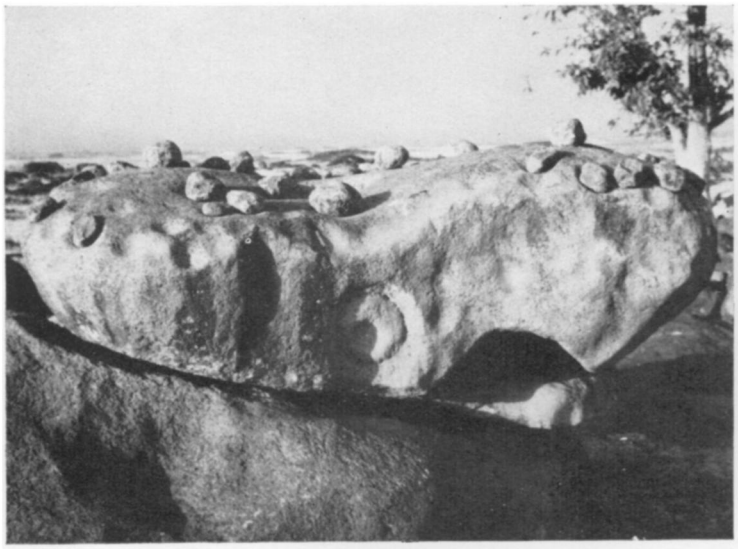

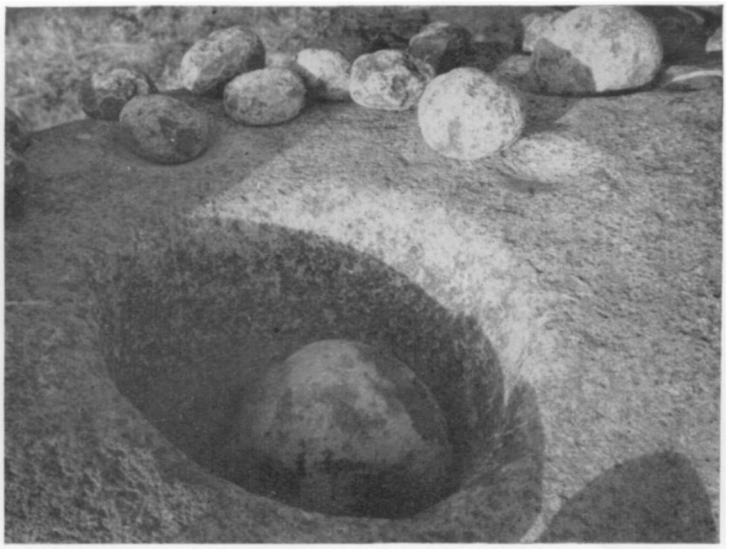

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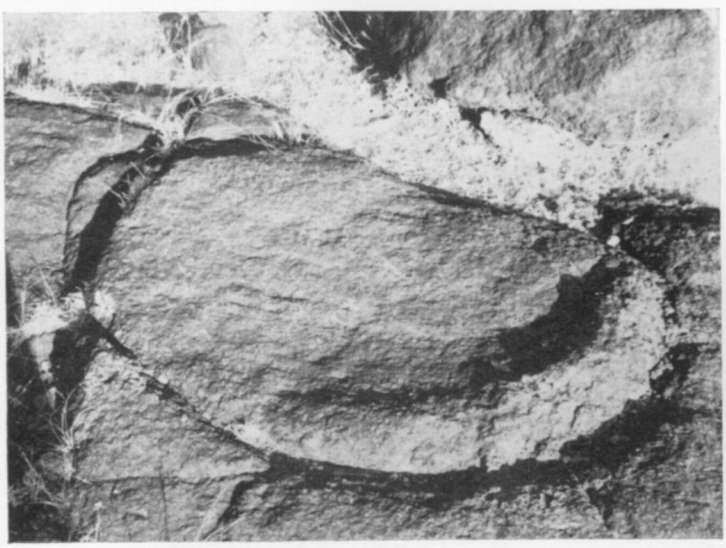

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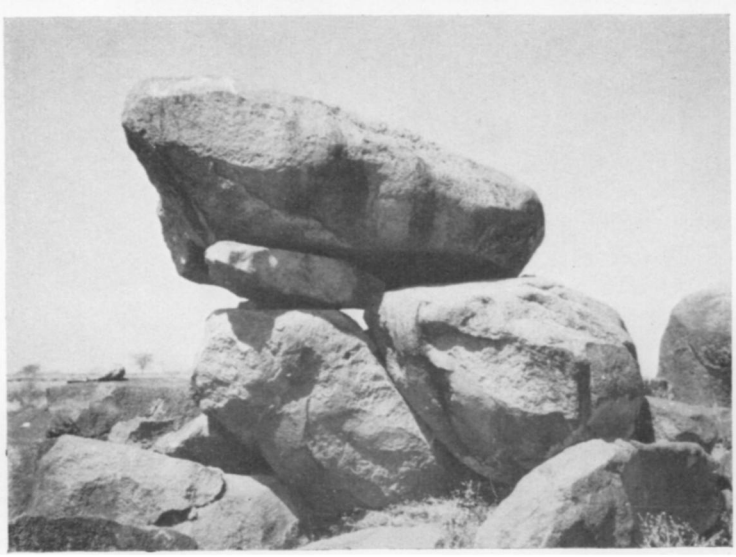

(f)

MEGALITHS IN THE POONA DISTRICT

(a–d) Bolhai's Kitchen. (a) The Ghat-shil, '*pot rock,' showing the 12-inch circle. The cup marks are made by the stones, which are rubbed to produce a clear ringing sound from the top stone, which is supported only at four or five points. The actual 'goddess' is an oval lump of basalt fitted into the stone under the 'arch.' (b) One of the holes in the upper surface of (a). (c) Oval on bed rock; length nearly three feet. (d) Large oval on bed rock; length 5 feet 11 inches. (e–f) Naigaum High Place. (e) The capstone, c. 4 feet long, which has deep ovals graven on top. (f) Multiple ovals graven on boulder of megalith.* *Photographs: D. D. Kosambi*

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MEGALITHS IN THE POONA DISTRICT*

by

DR. D. D. KOSAMBI

Poona

108 All known South Indian megaliths seem to belong to the Iron Age.[1] The only dated[2] complex falls between 200 B.C. and A.D. 50. The sole published report[3] of megaliths in the Poona district refers to structures erected within living memory as menhirs, dolmens and the like. The finds reported here seem to be the first of their type and region that belong to prehistory.

Over a hundred of these megaliths are found in Poona district, from its south-eastern tip at Khanota to Pabal, 40 miles north of Poona. The greatest density and highest technique is concentrated within the village limits of Theur, Naigaum (Plate G*e*, *f*) and Koregon-Mul, on the south bank of the Mula river. The remains here not only cluster as thickly as round barrows on parts of Salisbury Plain, but conform so well to a pattern that one has the sensation of going round in circles when the area is traversed. The normally favoured site is on some natural outcrop of basalt; but some of the large stones—four feet or more on the longest side—have been moved from a distance, and at times raised as capstones upon others. The characteristic marks which prove human artifice are ovals (Plate G*c*, *d*) and re-curved lines graven on many component rocks of the pile, or on the bedrock. A small oval may at times be paired with one much larger to resemble a head with limbless trunk. The bulging interior of many of the ovals (Plate G*d*) gives a curious resemblance to the basalt 'bombs' so often found in the Deccan. But the natural egg-shaped core surrounded by softer layers of rock that weather away can always be distinguished from the gravid ovals engraved on rock of uniform quality.

All the cairns, dolmens, ovals and lines are regarded as natural by the superstitious local peasantry which unhesitatingly uses megalithic stones for construction. There is no earthen tumulus, nor evidence for any such having been washed away by the rains, ever found with a megalith. Earth mounds would have been easier to make than the rock piles, given proper digging tools. The frequency with which microliths are found among or near the rocks of the megaliths is greater than for other ground in the same villages, particularly at Theur which was a great fishing camp in prehistory. The megaliths are too numerous in the central area above to have been ordinary places of worship. At the same time, the underlying bedrock makes it very unlikely that they cover burials. Wherever a strong modern cult survives at a well preserved megalith, it is always that of a mother goddess. The best-known is the goddess Bolhai at Vadē, who receives the ritual sacrifice of several goats or sheep every Sunday from villagers who might journey two days or more by bullock cart to fulfil a vow. The modern temple is a mile away from the initial monument shown in the photograph. The old site, known as Bolhai's Kitchen (Plate G*a*), lies at an impressive concentration of microliths (fig. 1), surrounded by numerous megalithic remains. The original goddess is a natural, oval lump of stone, coated with minium and fitted into a hollow in the wedge stone which keeps the capstone from sliding off the monolithic base. The man-made arch in the capstone under which Bolhai lies does not bear the marks of metal tools. Numerous cup marks on the rock have been formed by the constant rubbing of pestle-like muller stones. The rubbing forms part of a ritual whose significance is now forgotten, though the particular capstone (size seven by four feet, average thickness two feet), being of fine basalt supported only at a few points, emits a clear bell-like tone when struck or when any of the mullers is rubbed in its cup (Plate G*b*). The ringing could not have been the original purpose of this cup, because such cup marks are often found on dumb megalith rocks. One cup, complete with muller, is on Bolhai's rock base and emits no sound (fig. 2). The

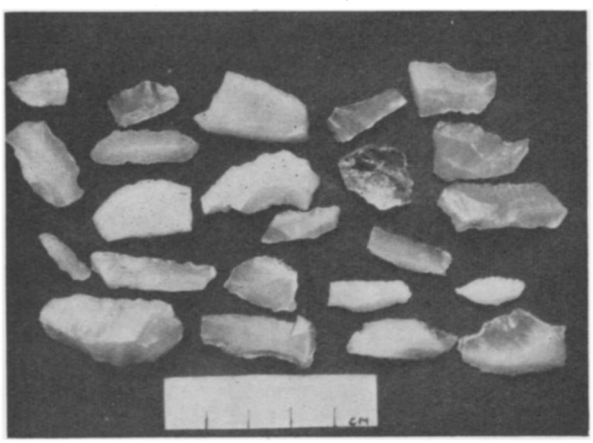

FIG. 1. SELECTED MICROLITHS FROM BOLHAI'S KITCHEN

Satvai of Theur is the mother goddess of childbirth as well as a demoness and the fairy who determines the child's future; she, too, receives numerous blood sacrifices at the megalith which she now inhabits. This pile has been tampered with, but the circle of Satvai, like that of Bolhai, is ancient. Such (comparatively rare) circles are about 12 inches in diameter (fig. 3); standardization seems to have been achieved by using the thumb and finger of an adult hand as compasses, for measurement shows deviations from a perfect circle which could easily have been avoided by the simple device of using a taut string for radius. A third such goddess is the Mandhrai of Varvand, in a natural

* *With Plate G and four text figures*

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hollow under a heavy capstone (fig. 4). The two latter sites have fewer microliths than Bolhai. Varvand High Place had several prehistoric cults, to judge from the hollowed arches, dolmens and ovals scattered over its hundred-foot length, not to speak of the adjoining megaliths. The names Bolhai and Mandhrai have no acceptable meaning or etymology, nor has the Borzai who now inhabits a megalith as the Tyche of Sonori.

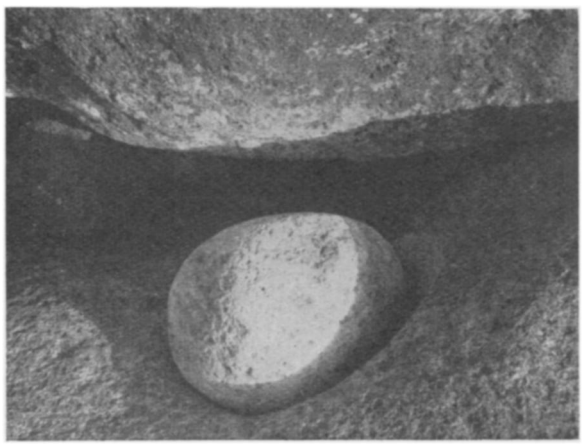

FIG. 2. DUMB CUP AND MULLER ON BASE ROCK, BOLHAI'S KITCHEN

The region about Theur was settled[4] well before 13 March, A.D. 768, when the Rashtrakuta king Krishna I (famous for the construction of the great Kailasa temple at Ellora) gave the village of Koregaon-on-the-Mula to brahmins from Karhad. All surrounding villages named in the

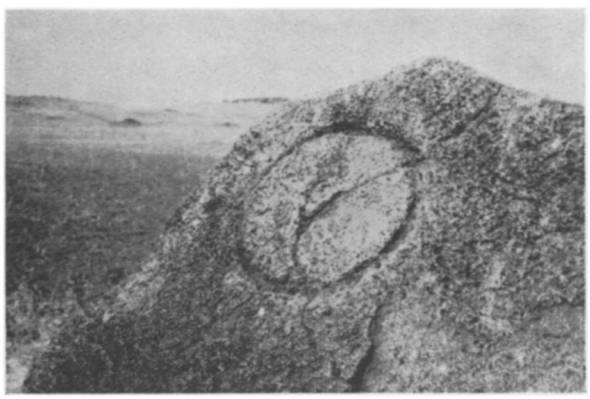

FIG. 3. NEARLY PERFECT CIRCLE ON PERIPHERAL ROCK AT THEUR

Outer diameter 32 cm. At base of this boulder are graven several concentric ovals, dwindling almost to a point.

grant still exist, while the Poona district is also explicitly named. Change from food-gathering to agricultural village settlement in Maharashtra dates from the middle of the sixth century B.C. Iron seems to have been introduced from the north, presumably at the beginning of the first millennium B.C. or later. The Karle caves, with early woodwork dated at 280 B.C. by radiocarbon analysis, prove the widespread use of iron, profitable overseas trade, and the existence of local villages under plough agriculture—not later than 300 B.C. Bolhai, which lies demonstrably at the junction of the prehistoric tracks, was a great megalithic complex before the Iron Age. On the other hand, the villages did not always occupy the same position throughout their existence. For example, Alandi near Theur came down from a location high up the hill, a couple of centuries before the Rashtrakuta land-grant. An adjacent village mentioned in that grant could not have received its name (Dadima, now Dalimb) before the Kushan period (1st–3rd centuries A.D.), for that name means 'pomegranate,' a fruit not of Indian origin. The descent of agricultural settle-

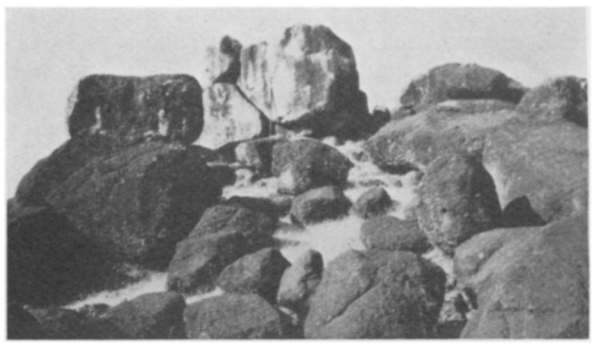

FIG. 4. NATURAL OUTCROP CONVERTED INTO MEGALITH AT VARVAND

Four of the stones in the foreground bear graven lines, while the capstone, left foreground, covers a living cult of Mandhrai, a goddess not known elsewhere. The stick is 45 inches long.

ments from the dry uplands occurred in several waves and was made possible by pastoral immigration. The cattlemen brought a male god, Mhatoba, with them; their descendants continue the worship. One such Mhatoba is located in the suburbs of Poona city, at the hilltop junction of Kotharud and Pashan villages. As patron deity of the former village (now over two miles away in the valley) he enjoys a considerable prestige; the track of his migration can be traced for about 30 miles through local tradition. The boulder representing the god is actually part of a demolished megalith, the rest of which has been broken up for the rude enclosure. Stones with the characteristic graven lines have been re-used for some of the 50 or so low cairns in soft soil immediately to the north-east of this Mhatoba. It is clear that the megaliths had been forgotten for centuries before agriculture developed in the Poona region by the final, viable fusion of cattle-herders with food-gathering tribesmen.

Notes

[1] Numerous reports in *Ancient India* cover this field; in particular, a survey by K. R. Srinivasan and N. R. Banerjee in No. 9 (1953), pp. 103–15.

[2] R. E. M. Wheeler, 'Brahmagiri and Chandravalli, 1947,' *Ancient India*, No. 4 (1948), pp. 180–310. The dating is presented on p. 300.

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3 H. D. Sankalia, 'Megalithic Monuments Near Poona,' *Bull. Deccan Coll. Res. Inst.*, Vol. I (1939–40), pp. 178–84; Vol. II (1940–41), p. 184. The Munjaba shrine was built by people still living, another 'dolmen' two or three years before the learned author visited the site; a vertical slab described (with photograph) as a 'menhir' was erected to guard the corner of a nineteenth-century brick house from the wheels of passing village carts.

4 Sten Konow on the Talegaon (Dhamdhere) copper plates of Krishnaraja I, *saka* year 690, in *Epigraphia Indica*, Vol. XIII, pp. 275–82.

THE WITHDRAWAL OF THE HIGH GOD IN WEST AFRICAN RELIGION: AN ESSAY IN INTERPRETATION

by

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109 Most West African religions have a high god who is also a sky god. But he is often a withdrawn high god, a *deus otiosus*. There is an apparent contradiction between the supremacy of the high god and his withdrawal from concern with the world. The attributes assigned to him heighten this effect of contradiction. He is said to be at the origin of all things, often as a creator; he is all-knowing and all-powerful; he introduces order into the chaos of the universe; he is the final arbiter of right and wrong. The other gods are under him and share in his power, though how they do so is not always well defined. But in spite of these attributes the high god is not usually directly worshipped; he has no priests and no shrines are dedicated to him; people may make a token offering to him in every sacrifice but hardly ever do they offer a sacrifice exclusively to him. This absence of ritual worship is implicit in many myths that describe—and often try to explain—his withdrawal from close association with the humans whom he has made. K. L. Little's description of the high god of the Mende people would need little altering to hold true of other peoples' conceptions of the high god:

> In the beginning there was *Leve*, spoken of nowadays as *Ngewọ*, which may be directly translated as (Supreme) God. All life and activity, in both a material and non-material sense, derives from him. *Ngewọ* created the world and everything in it, including not only human beings, animals, plants and so on, but spirits also. In addition, he invested the whole universe with a certain non-material kind of power or influence, which manifests itself in various ways and on specific occasions in human beings and animals, and even in natural phenomena, such as lightning, waterfalls, and mountains. He is the ultimate source and symbol of that power and influence, but though all-powerful, he is not an immanent being. Like most African Supreme Gods, having made the world, he retired far into the sky . . . Little is known about the exact nature of *Ngewọ*, because no one has ever seen Him. He is not entirely unapproachable, however, and sometimes a prayer may be addressed directly to Him. Indeed, it is customary to end most supplications with the expression, *Ngewọ lama*—'God willing.'[1]

Several attempts have been made to explain the withdrawal of the high god and his neglect in ritual. There is something to be gained from mentioning briefly two such attempts, one by Mircea Eliade, the other by Raffaele Pettazzoni, before venturing a further explanation. In the course of the exposition it should become clear that the phenomenon of withdrawal throws a great deal of light on the way in which men construct their ideas of the power that lies behind the universe and its forces.

(1) Eliade stresses the excessively abstract character of the sky god and suggests that this character allows him to be pushed aside in practice by divine forms that meet men's need of sensory contact and tangible imagery:

> What is clear is that the Supreme sky god everywhere gives place to other religious forms. The morphology of this substitution may vary; but its meaning is in each case partly the same; it is a movement away from the transcendence and passivity of sky beings towards more dynamic, active and easily accessible forms. One might say that we are observing a 'progressive descent of the sacred into the concrete'; man's life and his immediate natural surroundings come more and more to have the value of sacred things. His belief in *mana*, *orenda*, *wakan*, etc., animism, totemism, devotion to the spirits of the dead and local divinities, and so on, place man in a quite different religious attitude from that which he held towards the Supreme Being of the sky. The very structure of religious experience is changed. . . . Every substitution marks a victory for the dynamic, dramatic forms, so rich in mythological meaning, over the Supreme Being of the sky who is exalted, but passive and remote . . . the supreme divinities of the sky are constantly pushed to the periphery of religious life where they are almost ignored; other sacred forces, nearer to man, fill the leading role.[2]

(2) Pettazzoni prefers to move away from the kind of explanation propounded by Eliade to an explanation that does not depend on men's proclivity to find concrete powers more effectively real than more abstractly conceived creative omnipotence but that depends on this creative omnipotence itself:

> How can we explain this *otiositas*, which contrasts so strikingly with the highly dynamic character of the Creator? It has been supposed that we have here a secondary development, a kind of elimination of the Creator in face of other deities who in the end pushed him into the background. It may however be the case that *otiositas* itself belongs to the essential nature of creative Beings, and is in a way the complement of their creative activity. The world once made and the cosmos established, the Creator's work is as good as done. Any further intervention on his part would be not only superfluous but possibly dangerous, since any change in the cosmos might allow it to fall back into chaos. Once the world is made, the existential function of the

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